When time turned the tide

Raj Kapoor's loss was B R Chopra's gain. And time really favoured the BR banner. When Raj Kapoor rejected Akhtar Mirza's story, the writer went straight to B R Chopra. B R, a connoiseur of epic dramas, was on the lookout for a fresh plot, grabbed the story. *Waqt* came to

BR Films at a time when brother Yash was in the dumps, his debut film *Dharmputra* having failed at the box office inspite of all the critical acclaim.

Waqt, incidentally, has many firsts to its credit. It was the first colour film made by BR Films. And it is also acknowledged as the first major multi-starrer made in Hindi. In those days multi-starrers were not in vogue.

Waqt is the story of how a close knit family, comprising a couple and their three sons, gets separated following a massive earthquake and their reunion years later. Lala Kedarnath (Balraj Sahni) was a rich businessman. He was proud of his belief that man made his own destiny, until one day nature's fury shattered his home and conviction. A devastating earthquake separated his family. The eldest son (Raaj Kumar) turned by circumstances, into a smart thief, while the second son (Sunil Dutt), adopted by a wealthy family, went on to become a barrister. The youngest son (Shashi Kapoor) became a driver to support his ailing mother (Achala Sachdev).

BR Chopra had originally thought of casting the three Kapoor brothers in the film. But Bimal Roy, a close friend, advised him against it. Roy's reasoning was that the audience may not accept three brothers being projected as strangers, especially since the Kapoor brothers were known to be close to one another. So after a long hunt, Chopra opted for the suave and debonair Raaj Kumar to play the thief. His impressive, powerful dialogue delivery and style won him a large fan following despite the negative shades in the

character. The lines *Chinoy Seth, jo sheeshe ke ghar mein rehte hain, woh auron pe pathar nahin pheka karte...* and *Chakoo chalana bachchon ka khel nahin hai...* which he spoke in the film, became a rage. Sunil Dutt, a Chopra favourite (*Ek Hi Raasta* and *Gumraah*), easily fitted in the role of the second son. And Shashi Kapoor fitted the role of the youngest son to a T.

Even as the father's search for his lost family continues, *Waqt* turns into a love triangle with brothers Raaj Kumar and Sunil Dutt wooing the same girl. Chopra needed a pretty, petite girl for the heroine's role. His first choice was Mala Sinha, who had done *Dhool Ka Phool* and *Gumraah* for the BR banner, but she backed out when she heard that she would have to wear a swimming costume in one of the scenes. So the Chopras approached Sadhana, who was a big star then. Sadhana endowed with a perfect figure was game for the role. For the bubbly second lead they signed on Sharmila Tagore, who was making a debut in Hindi films with Shakti Samanta's *Kashmir Ki Kali*. Though Sharmila's Hindi was a bit awkward at that time she looked,the role and made her presence felt.

Balraj Sahni was the first choice to play the pivotal role of Lala Kedarnath. Reminisces Chopra, "We couldn't have found a better actor for that role. But Balraj was apprehensive of the song sequence, where he had to sing *O meri zohra zabeen...* But he soon overcame his apprehensions. We picturised the song at Kardar Studio and when the film was released it became a rage. Balraj had charmed his way into the hearts of the

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audience. The song is popular even today."

The difficult role of the lawyer was played by veteran Motilal. He had to deliver powerful but long-winding dialogues and he did it with flourish.

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Interestingly, inspite of the big star cast the Chopras had no problem completing *Waqt* as per schedule.

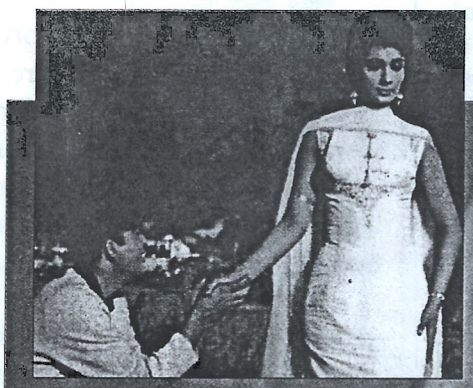
Picturising the devastating earthquake convincingly was a major challenge. But the Chopras wouldn't compromise. They hired Japanese technicians at great cost to do the job. Apparently, on the day of the shoot almost every cameraman in the film industry turned up at Kardar Studios to witness history being made. The technicians asked B R Chopra to provide them with a miniature set comprising buildings, roads, trees in plaster of Paris and a large mirror. They suspended the mirror from the ceiling with a fine but strong wire. Then they placed the miniature set below the mirror and placed the camera in position.

With Waqt

churidaars became a rage. It was Sadhana's idea to wear *churidaar* for a particular scene which Yash was shooting. Initially Yash didn't like the idea. But Sadhana was confident that people would like her in *churidaars*. So with her designer Bhanu Athaiya she worked out a white and gold raw silk *churidaar-kameez*. When Yash saw her looking ravishing in it, his resistance melted away

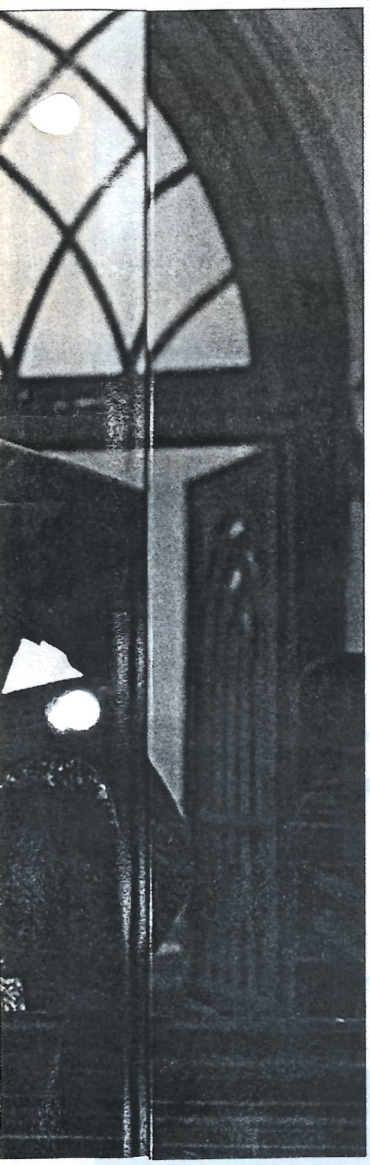
When the camera began rolling, the Japanese team started shaking the mirror and the buildings and the trees reflected in it quivered violently creating the desired effect. Finally when they pulled the invisible thread away the set of the miniature buildings and trees came crashing down. The scene turned out to be a major highlight of the film. The Chopras had to pay through their nose for the seamingly simple 'trick'.

For the title song Yash Chopra wanted late Sahir to emphasise the significance



of time. Initially Sahir was reluctant for he thought that emphasising fate and time was a defeatist idea. But after a prolonged discussion he came up with the classic number *Waqt se din aur raat, waqt se kal aur aaj...*"

Few know that with *Waqt churidaars* became a rage. It was Sadhana's idea to wear *churidaar* for a particular scene which Yash was shooting. Initially Yash didn't like the idea. He told her, "Indians are highly traditional and are used to sarees and salwars. They will never accept *churidaars*." But Sadhana was confident that people would like her in *churidaars*. So with her designer Bhanu Athaiya she worked out a white and gold raw silk *churidaar-kameez*. When Yash saw her looking ravishing in it, his resistance melted away. After the release of *Waqt* ladies tailors all over India were swarmed by a demand for *churidaar-kameez*. The outfit became a fashion statement with women of all ages. For a long time after *Waqt salwaars* seemed outdated.



After the release date of *Waqt* was set and the prints were dispatched to exhibitors, the 1965 Indo-Pak war broke out. There was instant action and the Chopras recalled the prints and postponed the release indefinitely. Finally the film was released on (????????date) with a glittering premiere at Bombay's Naaz cinema. The event started with the Chopras performing a *puja* in their office in the presence of all the stars, crew and the office staff. All the male stars of the team wore identical black suits from the same material bought in bulk by the Chopras. The female stars were given the option of wearing white sarees of their choice.

Waqt was an instant sensation. It broke several box office records. The film also made it into the history of Hindi cinema as the first real multistarrer.

Ashok Iyer

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